

NEW YORK POST
11 June 1986ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 2

PREZ AIDES IN CONTRA-VERSY -DEALINGS WITH NICA PROBED

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WASHINGTON — President Reagan last night was faced with a new political confrontation with Democrats in Congress over whether some of his top advisers violated a 1984 congressional ban on direct contact with the U.S.-backed rebels in Nicaragua.

As Reagan began a new lobbying blitz to gain Congressional approval for his \$100 million military-aid request for Nicaragua's contra rebels, word leaked out yesterday of a congressional investigation into potentially illegal contacts between members of the National Security Council, the CIA and the contras.

According to administration and congressional sources, the probe, spearheaded by longtime Reagan critics Rep. Michael Barnes (D-Md.) and Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) is looking into links between NSC and CIA officials and a network of conservative activists and private "contract" intelligence operatives who appear to have been carrying messages between the White House

and the contras.

At the center of the investigation is Lt. Col Oliver North, the highly respected deputy director for politico-military affairs for the NSC, who established the network of intermediaries headed by conservative activist Robert Owen and Ret. Army Maj. Gen John K. Singlaub.

Owen, 32, a graduate of Stanford University and a former congressional staffer, reportedly won a \$50,675 State Dept. consultancy grant on Nicaragua that ended last month, and began working out of North's office in the Old Executive Office Building helping raise private funds for arms purchases and enlistment of private military trainers and served as a conduit be-

tween North and the contra leaders.

Owen also had contact with the CIA's clandestine service branch, sources said.

There was no public comment from the White House or State Dept. to the charges that have emerged through a series of well-orchestrated leaks by congressional Democrats.

Administration officials acknowledged privately that there was some contact between Singlaub, Owen and North's office, but said there was nothing illegal about those contacts.

One official charged that congressional Democrats are "peddling disinformation" about those contacts, in an attempt to sabotage Reagan's lobbying blitz this month to gain congressional approval of the \$100 million military-aid package to the contras.

According to congressional sources, the probe is focusing on whether Owen's use of State Dept. funds and North's NSC offices violated provisions of a law passed by Congress on Oct. 10, 1984 forbidding U.S. officials from any direct involvement in planning or executing military operations inside Nicaragua.